

Kuntala Kumari Sabat

Pratibha Ray



Makers of Indian Literature

Kuntala Kumari Sabat

The sculpture reproduced on the end paper depicts a scene where three soothsayers are interpreting to King Suddhodana the dream of Queen Maya, mother of Lord Buddha. Below them is seated a scribe recording the interpretation. This is perhaps the earliest available pictorial record of the art of writing in India.

From Nagarjunakonda, 2nd century A.D.

Courtesy : National Museum

MAKERS OF INDIAN LITERATURE

Kuntala Kumari Sabat

Pratibha Ray



SAHITYA AKADEMI

SAHITYA AKADEMI
Rabindra Bhavan, 35 Ferozeshah Road, New Delhi 110 001
Sales : Swati, Mandir Marg, New Delhi 110 001
Jeevantara, 23A/44X, Diamond Harbour Road, Calcutta 700 053
Guna Buildings, II Floor, 304-305 Anna Salai, Teynampet, Chennai 600 018
172 Mumbai Marathi Grantha Sangrahalaya Marg, Dadar, Mumbai 400 014
ADA Rangamandira, 109 J. C. Road, Bangalore 560 002

ISBN 81-260-0214-X

First Published 1997

Price : Rs 25

Published by the Sahitya Akademi
Typesetting by Reprocan, 27 M. G. Road, Calcutta 700 009
Printed at Mitra Press,
18B, Pataldanga Street, Calcutta 700 009

Contents

1
Introduction

Orissa, with its ancient glory and rich cultural heritage, suffered a heavy loss during the medieval period. The loss was experienced in the fields of art and architecture, trade and commerce, martial art and military glory. The decline of Orissa was almost complete by the end of the nineteenth century. King Mukunda Dev lost to the Sultan of Bengal, Suleiman Karni, in 1568. Subsequently Orissa came under the Moghuls and the Marahattas and finally in 1803 under the British. The ancient glory of Orissa appeared to be a mere legend. Orissa lost its separate political boundary and it vainly groped for an identity. The Oriya speaking tracts were tagged to either Bengal or Bihar. Having no roads, it was connected with Calcutta only through steamer. Oppressed by the feudal system and exploited by the unscrupulous officers of neighbouring provinces, the uneducated masses were pushed to dire poverty. Efforts at various stages were made to obliterate the Oriya language. Concerted efforts were there to make the Bengali the official and court language, and also the medium of instruction in schools. Some zealous officers made efforts to establish a notion that Oriya was merely a dialect of Bengali. This language crisis became the genesis of future resurgence of Oriya consciousness. Poets beginning with Radhanath, Madhusudan and Fakirmohan to those belonging to the Satyavadi and Sabuja Schools have trumpeted the cause of this consciousness. Kuntala Kumari who wrote odes to beautiful flowers, and soared to dizzy heights of mysticism in her poetry, also imbibed the spirit of this consciousness. The strain may be noticed in all her works—poetry, prose, essays and letters.

Successive aggressions resulted in the destruction of temples and decapitation and mutilation of deities. A large

number of people were converted to Islam and Christianity during the Muslim and the British rule. Between 1822 and 1845, Kampton, Pegs, Mrs. & Mr. Keri, Mrs. & Mr. Sutton, Mrs. & Mr. Lesy, J. Grant, J. Miller and a few other missionaries were working in Orissa. The conversion campaign had resulted in the growth of about seven Christian villages, and several small pockets in towns by 1944.

The Sabats lived in the neighbourhood of Pipili in Puri. They were Brahmins, who dealt in vegetables. Their women took to spinning to supplement the family-income. Brajabandhu Sabat and his wife Sobha having no issue adopted a young boy named Shyamratan. Brajabandhu was a little miserly and close-fisted. It is said that once the husband and wife had a wrangle over a sari. A sensitive Sobha could not swallow the taunting words of her husband and jumped into a well. And the remorseful Brajabandhu also followed her into it and ended his life. Their son Shyamratan was looked after by relatives but he would frequently go on errands for them. One day he went out but did not return. After some days it was known that Shyamratan was kidnapped by Rev. J. Miller. This created a sensation. The leaders of the village mustered up enough courage to approach *Padri-Saheb* with a cart-load of presents. Rev. Miller did not miss this occasion to give a long sermon. The sum and substance of which was : "You, fools, idol-worshippers are destined to be consigned to purgatory. You are fortunate that the son of God in his infinite mercy has saved at least one of your men from hell." Then finding that his valuable words did not enter the thick skulls of these orthodox people, he chased them away with an iron rod. Miller had converted a Khandayat family of Khurda, who happened to be in his service. Sadhabi, a girl of that family, had a little education in a school. Miller got Shyamratan wedded to her before he left for England; both of them lived in the Christian settlement at Khurda.

Shyamratan and Sadhabi had one son, Daniel, and a daughter. Daniel took up medicine after passing the Entrance Examination and was initially posted as a doctor at

Jagadalpur of Bastar. He married Monica, the daughter of Timanti Samantroy. Timanti was the headmaster of Khurda minor school for twenty-five years; he was also a teacher in Peary Mohan Academy, Cuttack for some time. His forefathers were Karan by caste and had become Christians under pressing circumstances. Daniel and Monica lived at Jagadalpur. They were all delighted when Daniel was blessed with a son. But the child died after a few months. The twin daughters who followed, also died in a few hours. All in the family were sad and unhappy, but not for long. Kuntala, their next child, was born on 8 February 1900.

2

Her Life

It is an irony of fate that the poet who in her short span of life had endeared herself to her people, was welcomed to this world not with open arms but with a kick. As three children had died earlier, expectations ran high before Kuntala's birth. But the baby when delivered was encased in a flimsy sack, and seemed to be the ghost of a child. Monica's mother-in-law who felt utterly dejected gave it a kick. The sack burst open and the baby uttered a cry. The grandmother had insisted on giving an Indian name to the girl and named the child as Kuntala. Both Kuntala's grandfather and grandmother clinged to Hindu culture and belief and remained Hindu at heart. The grandfather, Kuntala recollected, would often join his hands in reverence, whenever he saw a temple or a picture of Lord Jagannath or heard someone uttering the Lord's name. The young girl listened to the stories of the *Ramayan*, the *Mahabharat* and the *Puranas* narrated to her by her grandparents. She was fascinated by India's great heritage. Her father, Daniel, was learned and cultured. He spent his leisure in study and teaching the children. Her mother, Monica, was good looking, sociable and an efficient housewife.

Shortly after Kuntala's birth Daniel got a better job and went to Burma with his wife and child. So Kuntala spent her childhood in Burma. There she had imbibed the spirit of freedom and fearlessness, characteristic of the Burmese women. Her younger brothers and sisters were Sarala, Prafulla, Samuel and Nithaniel. Samuel died of pneumonia at an early age. A shocked Kuntala had fainted. The traumatic experience persisted and made her faint on occasions in later years.

Kuntala's father, Daniel, fell in love with his wife's beautiful younger sister, and they lived together in Burma.

Monica, a sacrificing Indian wife, did not stand on the.way of her husband's happiness and returned to Khurda with her young children. Kuntala spent about fourteen years of her life in Burma. She learnt Oriya as a second language. Her sister Prafullakumari writes 'There was no Oriya school. Father taught us English; we learnt a little Oriya from mother.' From the shopping paper-bags Kuntala learnt Bengali and Hindi at the age of seven. She would obstinately decide to take her meals only after she had learned the alphabet. Her fascination for languages made her learn Urdu, when she stayed in Delhi in the later part of her life. She learnt Oriya through Bhaktakavi Madhusudan's *Barnabodh* and his poetry. Being the eldest child, she helped all her brothers and sisters in their studies. She also learnt the *Bible,* which her mother used to read. Her passion for study made her forgetful and skip her meals. Kuntala was slip of a girl with thick and long flowing tresses, justifying her name. The parents were concerned for her weak physique and tried to curb her stubborn nature by threatening her that she would not be allowed to read. Once her father got annoyed and sternly told her that she was not permitted to read anything for eight days. The young rebel fasted for twenty-four hours and made her father yield. She was nine years then. Kuntala had a good sense of music and composed songs of prayer to the delight of her mother. As she was brought up in far off Burma she was not adequately conversant with Oriya but she showed her talent and tremendous promise as a poet. In giving the clue to Kuntala's genius, relates Prafulla Kumari "It fills me with wonder to think how she acquired so much in so little time. She had only four months' schooling in Revenshaw Girls' School, but she was soon promoted to the ninth standard for scoring the highest marks in all the subjects. The next four years in Medical School made her bag a record number of medals. She won recognition in India as a talented writer and an efficient physician. She presided over hundreds of conferences... Sincerity, patience and courage had enabled her to be in the front rank of women, fighting for the nation."

When Kuntala was nine, an incident in the neighbourhood brought her remarkable spirit to light. She used to visit a Maratha family living close to them. The husband was an engineer, who had a fiery temper. Once he got wild and started beating his wife mercilessly. Her weeping did not desist him from bashing her up. Kuntala who was present there, could not stand it any more, and shouted, "Do you want to kill her? Beware, if you touch her again I would report to police forthwith. Shame on you...". She went on haranguing, and burst into tears. The man was shocked and holding his wife's feet begged apology. He was a changed man after this incident; in gratitude he brought several presents for Kuntala and her family. The awe-struck neighbours who had kept a safe distance from the scene were astonished. Kuntala's father learning this episode told his wife in secret, "She is a gift from God. We are fortunate, but we have to carefully deal with her."

With Kuntala's returning from Burma to Orissa a new chapter in her life began. She was to join Ravenshaw Girls' School at Cuttack in a few months. Her short stay at Khurda was quite fascinating for her. She was captivated by the charming manners and affection of the Hindu girls of the village. So overwhelming was her feeling towards them that she had the dream to amass one lakh rupees, to establish an institution for the education of the women of the Barunei hills. She studied voraciously during this period borrowing books from Khurda Minor School and High School. She went through the published works in Oriya. She read the Bengali writings of Bankimchandra, Rabindranath, Hemchandra and Nabinchandra. She waded through the works of Shakespeare and the poetry of Shelley, Browning, Tennyson, Wordsworth and Byron. Though everything was not within her grasp, she liked to wrestle with the difficult portions and her power of comprehension was phenomenal.

An incident may well reveal the timidity of the common people in those days, and Kuntala's boldness as well. In response to some petitions made by the people, the European S.D.O. came to visit the area. He asked the

gathering crowd to state their difficulties, if any. The only reply he got was "yes, Sir", "What, yes Sir ? Answer my question", shouted the S.D.O. indignantly. Present on the spot Kuntala came forward to reply in her charming accent, "Sir, as regards difficulties, the petition speaks for itself. Perhaps you had no time to see it. The subordinates have not put up the same before you. We have no drains, no good roads...". And she narrated all the grievances of the people. The Saheb realised his mistake, and assured to redress the grievances. He took Kuntala to his bungalow and introduced her to his wife. After that the lady used to invite Kuntala on festive occasions. This boldness of Kuntala had stunned the people and they never dared to demur at Kuntala's actions.

Kuntala spent only four months in Ravenshaw Girls' School. She was anxious to support her family and was determined to join the Medical School. She stood second in the Entrance test but complained of discrimination. The test was repeated and Kuntala topped the successful candidates. These four years may seem to be the most difficult period in Kuntala's career, when she had to struggle against crushing poverty and strong currents of adversity. Her character, demeanour and brilliance drew the affection and goodwill from all quarters. At the end of the four year term, she came out with flying colours, winning an array of sixteen gold and silver medals. Lady doctors in Orissa were very few in number in those days. Kuntala's sincerity, simplicity and soothing words won the hearts of people and she grew popular in a short time. She tried her best to alleviate the suffering of the poor and ailing.

While in Medical School Kuntala was drawn towards Dr. Kailash Rao, her teacher. Kuntala's brilliance and charming manners had also attracted his attention. Mutual appreciation developed into love. Kuntala expressed her desire to marry Kailash. But he was an orthodox Barhmo, sixteen years senior to her, and father of two children. Thus marrying Kuntala was an unthinkable proposition for him. Her feelings gushed forth in effusions of poetry, expressing her yearning for the adored. "It is not a man of

flesh and blood who deserves your devotion and worship. Turn it to God. "Kailash admonished her appealingly. As a friend and philosopher, Kailash guided Kuntala and helped her in the publication of her early poems. But for Kuntala the infatuation seemed to persist and haunt her to the end . It was a tragedy. And who knows that the sweetest songs she gave to the readers are not the ones that tell us of her saddest thoughts!

Like Maharshi Debendranath and Keshab Chandra Sen in Bengal, Bhaktakavi Madhusudan and Bagmi Biswanath Kar in Orissa had accepted the Brahmo faith. Kuntala enrolled herself as a member of 'Nava Vidhan', the Brahmo society formed by Keshav Chandra. Finally she was accepted into the Brahmo fold. This conversion was an act of boldness, which shook the Christian society. She started receiving anonymous letters threatening her. Brick-bats and stones were pelted at her residence. Kuntala was helpless, but she was not scared. One day an angry Kuntala barged into the bungalow of the District Magistrate, Mr. Shaser and sought an interview with Mrs. Shaser. In the presence of Mrs. Shaser, she thundered, "A Christian girl, I am being oppressed by the men of my own nationality. Is it anywhere written in the *Bible* or the religious codes that a Christian cannot change her religion?" And in a spirited manner Kuntala referred to Vivekananda's speech in the World Religious Conference, Sister Nivedita, Annie Besant and Queen Victoria's declaration. She burst into saying, "How can the Christians in Cuttack lay evil hands on a girl like me and upbraid me and on what ground and under what reason?" Mrs. Shaser was deeply moved and embraced Kuntala. The police Superintendent, Lt. Col. Pupils, was asked to take action, and the miscreants were set right. Incidentally after some days one of those miscreants came to Kuntala, wept and confessed his guilt. His wife was having severe labour pain for four days and her condition was serious. She went to the patient's house, delivered a dead child and saved his wife. She was both fearless and forgiving.

The publication of Kuntala's poems in the literary journals

made her famous. Among women, Sulakhyana Devi, and Annapurna had published a few poems in *Sahakar*. They were not well known, however. When Kuntala's anthology of poems, *Anjali* came out, her name became a household word. Letters of appreciation came pouring in, and quite many of them superscribed, "Kuntala Kumari Sabat, Cuttack". She had become so widely known that this address proved sufficient. She won approbation from almost all the literary figures of Orissa. Gopal Chandra Praharaj, the eminent lexicographer, adopted her as his daughter. The eight year period after the completion of her course in Medicine was the most productive one in her creative career. She wrote profusely, published a series of poems in different journals. Her collections of poems and novels were also brought out during this period. If her life was brief, her poetic career was meteoric. In a short time she shot into limelight. Her dazzling performance drew applause from many quarters, but had its blinding effects too. Thus a literary group of young sceptics from Berhampur once approached her for evidence. They asked her to compose on-the-spot a poem in the pattern of Madhusudan Rao's famous 'Bharat Bhabana' (Thought on India). Kuntala responded with modesty, characteristic of an Oriya woman. But once the gauntlet had been thrown down at her, she sat for a while and scribbled out a long poem, opening with :

> Is this Bharat, the same hallowed land
> whose soil bore the holy feet of Aryan Rishis
> Which saw the first flush of civilisation,
> its flourish;
> Whose sky echoed in hours of dawn and dusk
> the immortal Vedic hymns.
> Is this Bharat, the same land of glory !

When she sang the lines with her musical voice, the critics were overwhelmed and paid her their repeated salutes. The orthodox Mukti Mandap Pandit Mahasabha of Sri Jagannath temple, Puri, in an unprecedented gesture, felicitated Kuntala with citation. A leading cultural association of women conferred on her the fitting title of 'Utkal Bharati'.

Pallikavi Nandakishore loved her as a daughter and gave her a warm reception at his village Kusupur. He gave a glowing introduction to her anthology of poems, *Uchhwas*. Kuntala had a second occasion to visit his family at Kusupur in connection with the treatment of some members. This time she was to stay for eleven days. The love and affection poured on her made her remember afterwards that these eleven days were like eleven steps to heaven. She would often fondly recollect the simplicity, and charm of those young girls in Khurda who were so intimate to her, and the hearty and lively treatment of the young women at Kusupur, and the abundance of love and affection showered on her by them. And these, in her heart, had etched an image of Oriya women, who, she thought, in feminine beauty and grace were unique. Maybe her deep love for Orissa and its people had coloured her vision. She said that if one wants to find a Lavanyavati, a Kotibramhandasundari of Upendra Bhanja in real life, it is here, it is among the women of Orissa, and nowhere.

A maternity welfare centre was opened at Cuttack in 1925 and Kuntala got an offer. This was run by the Red Cross Society. The remuneration was not lucrative but Kuntala accepted it. Pleased with Kuntala's commendable service, Lady Wheeler, the then Governor's wife, enhanced the remuneration. But Kuntala's spirit always sought freedom. However engrossed in occupational activities, Kuntala could not dislodge Kailash from her mind. Perhaps she never wanted to forget him. She learned about an association in Delhi working for the remarriage of widows and rehabilitation of destitute women. It appealed for public help. After correspondence one Dr K. P. Brahmachari of doubtful identity came to meet her. Incidentally Krishnaprasad was an Oriya, a self-styled doctor and *Brahmachari*, who had borrowed his first title from his past service in a medicine shop, and the other epithet from his studentship in some Gurukul. On 17 June, 1928 Utkalmani Gopabandhu passed away. The people mourned their leader. On 1 July Kuntala left for Delhi with Krishnaprasad. Perhaps little did she know that she was leaving Cuttack for good. This marks the end of her Orissa chapter. She left her native

soil and the lap of her mother.

Swami Dayananda Saraswati was a pioneer in the conversion of willing people to the Sanatan faith, and the Arya Samaj was carrying on this task. After the required *sanskaras* and ceremonies Kuntala was initiated into the Vedic religion. In the mean time she came under the spell of Krishnaprasad; she was impressed by his activities for the rehabilitation of widows and fallen women. She had by now lost all hopes of union with Kailash to whom she had given her heart. She must have felt all alone as the one Oriya lady in that distant capital city. Finally in August that year she married Krishanprasad according to Vedic rites, and thus embarked on a new phase of her life. This marriage had brought an abrupt end to Kuntala's literary career in Oriya. However, she started writing in Hindi. Kuntala's sincerity as a physician and her lovable personality soon established her popularity in this new station of life. Krishnaprasad was no match for Kuntala. He gambled and lost her earnings in projects like Bharati Medical Hall and printing press, which proved to be a wild goose chase. His motive of making a quick buck was a positive deterrent to Kuntala's intellectual pursuits. Yet her talents in a short time established her in the public life of Delhi. Besides English and Bengali, she wrote about a hundred poems in Hindi, edited a number of Hindi journals. She was invited by the Allahabad University and Benaras Hindu University to deliver lectures. She delivered the convocation address of Gurukul Viswa Vidyalaya, Brindaban. Kuntala presided over the All India Arya Mahila Sammilan at Bareli. She was made the chairperson of a reputed social organisation founded by Harbilash Sarada for the introduction of widow marriage and abolition of child marriage. She was made the President of the students federation at Aligarh and the Jhansi Rani Laxmibai celebration committee, Gwalior. And yet the thought of Orissa was always uppermost in her mind. Through Bharati Tapovan she wanted to encourage, publish and project at the national level all that was best in the literature, art and sculpture of Orissa. The last she came to Orissa was in 1931, to preside over the Orissa Women's

Conference at Balasore. As she stood on the soil so dear to her, the feeling of nostalgia made her ecstatic. Through Bharati Tapovan, Kuntala was associated with the eminent writers in the field of Hindi literature. Maithili Saran Gupta, Yeashpal Jee Jain, S. H. Batsayan, Ajneya, Jainendra Kumar, and a host of leading Hindi writers knew her and appreciated her writings. Hindi Pracharini Sabha conferred on her the title of 'Bharat Kavinetri'.

Kuntala was the mother of two daughters, and she eagerly awaited for the birth of a son. And it came on 23 August 1938. After the delivery, the nurse told her that it was a son. She smiled, closed her eyes, and fell into a swoon. Then she passed into silence.

3

Her Poetry

Kuntala's poetic career began quite early in her life. As a girl she had composed beautiful poems in Oriya. The one she wrote on the occasion of leaving Ravenshaw Girls' School in order to continue her studies at the Medical School at Cuttack was a moving one that revealed her strange aspirations and great commitment to Oriya literature.

Kuntala composed several poems in the form of prayers which she used to sing in her untutored mellifluous voice to the delight of her mother. But this valedictory composition gave her the conviction of the gift she was prodigiously endowed with. When Orissa had reached the nadir of its decline, Radhanath, through his poetry, had given an impetus to the national consciousness of the Oriyas. This was taken up further by the poets of Satyabadi School, and other poets like Padmacharan and Kantakabi Laxmikanta. Kuntala was tormented at the decline of Orissa and the Oriyas. Through her poems she recalled the glorious heritage of Orissa, the greatness of its past and the disgraceful present, urging the nation to wake up from slumber. The freedom struggle also stirred her mind. She resigned a lucrative government service, and through her writings gave a clarion call to the people to fight for freedom.

An equally dominant strain in her poetry was a mystic passion which permeated the bulk of her poems. The spontaneity and effortlessness apparent in her lyrical compositions evidently show this trait. Publication of her poem 'Tara prati', (Ode to a star) published in *Utkal Sahitya,* the leading literary journal of the day, brought her to limelight. Immediately after its publication, followed recognition from all quarters. Eminent Oriya writers sent her their unstained approbation. Professor Bijoy Chandra Mazumdar placed this poem along with the selected poems

of all eminent poets such us Radhanath, Usudan, Fakirmohan, Gangadhar and Nanda Kishore in his *Typical Selections from Oriya Literature*, published by Calcutta University in 1925. "I awoke one morning and found myself famous", she could have said like Byron. 'Kamal prati' (Ode to a lotus) and 'Puja' (worship) were subsequently published in *Utkal Sahitya*.

The first anthology of her poems entitled *Anjali* (offering) came out in 1923. Despite the author's reluctance, the Queen of the state of Darpani , who had been cured by Kuntala's treatment, offered to pay for its publication. As in Rabindranath's *Gitanjali*, the young poetess offers in it her heartfelt love and devotion to the Lord. After the traditional Vaishnav forms of Bhakti, she supplicates Lord as a slave, and at times as a friend (sakha), or as His beloved (Kāntā). She often experiences a feeling of profound emptiness being kept away from Lord's grace, and expresses the thirst and cravings of her soul. The yearning of the soul for its Lord, the 'Atmā-paramātmā Bhava' forms the undertone in these offerings. A few critics of Kuntala's poems have viewed personal aspects involved in these poems written in her early days.

The response of love from her human beloved had eluded her and sharpened her longings. There might be an element of truth in it. Ease, grace and lucidity seem to have rendered many of these lyrics exquisitely beautiful. In their intensity and ardour they are 'genuine poetry conceived in the soul.' Though alleged as avowedly personal, they have the appeal and characteristics of the universal. Her unflinching faith in God finds expression in these lines :

> What if,
> This heart turns dreary,
> Mind, emptied of cravings,
> Eyes lack lustre,
> Tears dry up,
> My charm vanishes,
> My days pass away,
> Nights as well,

And yet
Do I trust
That Thou woudst appear.

(Gala dina hai gala bibhabari)

She was steeped in the epics and scriptures of India of which she was rightly proud. Her spiritual attainments might not have reached lofty heights, but she entered into the spirit of Sanatana Dharma. Her broadness and catholicity broke the false barriers of sectarian religions. 'Puja paddhati' (Ways of worship) in which the poet has shown the identity and harmony of various ways to realisation, is a masterpiece unsurpassed in modern Oriya literature. A well-known scholar and critic Pandit Nilakantha once stated : "I believe, no one in Oriya literature ever wrote on various modes of worship in such a manner, so universal and so touching". Gopabandhu's open-air school at Satyabadi adopted it as their regular prayer.

In her courtyard she had seen an old Sephali tree flowering day after day. The flowers used to blossom for the night, and in the morning they fell down profusely scattered on the ground. This evoked in her a feeling to write, 'Sephali prati' (Ode to Sephali). The philosophy of Kuntala's life—this life which is fleeting and ephemeral enshrines a soul that is undying and eternal—is capsuled in the following lines :

Small and short-lived
As you, so I,
I live smiling,
Smelling sweetly
For a while only
As you,
You shall return to dust
And so would I,
But the flower that my soul is,
Will never fade.
With this hope,
I do pass my days.

(Ode to Sephali)

It is a refreshingly beautiful poem, untainted by the debasing touch of man or machines or the blight of commercialism. It is included in the collection, *Uchhwas* (Effusion), along with five other odes. Introducing the book, Pallikavi Nanda Kishore had summed up Kuntala's achievement. Nanda Kishore felt that, "At such a young age and with the study of medicine ill-matched with literary pursuits, Kunfala, not to speak of women, had no rival even among men as a poet. Flavoured with Divine Love, a spiritual strain permeates through all her poems. The young poet had discovered God in Nature and Divinity in human soul."

This, from Pallikavi, was a fitting tribute. Keats, who occupies a unique place in English literature, had six odes to his credit. These six odes of Kuntala likewise deserve for her a distinct place in Oriya literature. Her oneness with nature, an inner quest and her mystic appeal, give strength and power to her poetry. Long descriptions and repeatation of thought however appear to be her flaw. "Death cannot be my end, my ultimate goal, never", she goes on to speak. And she looks to the world beyond, while pointing her questions to the star :

Dwelling thou in the sky
can you tell me, where
My true home is ?
Tell me,
why this exile ? (Ode to a star)

If Kuntala at times soared to heights of imagination and appeared other-worldly, she was also down-to-earth and pragmatic. If Joan of Arc listened to voices, Kuntala too heard the call; Call of her fallen brethren grovelling in dust, seeking support; call of her motherland struggling to free herself from the shackles; call of the teeming millions, the suffering humanity asking for her healing touch. The entire land was caught in the web of agitation and boycott of foreign goods. "Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive" had said the poet. Kuntala's heart was brimming with patriotic feelings. She gave up mill-made clothes and took to home-

spun *khadar*, which she used to wear all her life.

In 1924 the Utkal Sammilani, chaired by Acharya P. C. Roy, was inaugurated with the anthem composed by Kuntala for the occasion, *Koti-Kirti-Mukta-Malini* as its opening lines. Of the English poems she wrote, only one entitled 'The neglected land' written in her immature years, is available. A couple of stanzas from the poem would show her feelings for this land she loved most :

Now all a story, a lovely myth,
The faded golden day's last ray,
But beneath the deep dark clouds
peeps the gleam of a glorious day.

*   *   *

We love thy every leaf and flower,
We love thy breeze, thy stormy gust,
Thy desert is our oasis bower,
We crave thy humble divine dust.

(The neglected land)

Her love for Orissa and India, her concern for the poor and downtrodden form the theme of her poems in the anthology *Archana*, to which a foreword was written by Professor Bijoy Chandra Mazumdar of Calcutta University. In it Mazumdar indicates that some of Kuntala's prose writings had been published in Bengali. Words of Vivekananda deeply impressed her. Her voice for the poor is immensely moving:

As pangs of hunger
I exist
In slums,
I exist
in tears that trickle
From widows' eyes,
In the destitute's garb
Under the trees
I sleep;
And you, heedless
Dwell cosily in mansions ?

(Archana)

Her admirers wished her to wield the pen to arouse the

young. Godavarish Mahapatra wanted her "not to shine just as a bright star, but flash as a comet in Orissa's literary firmament," and trumpet her message to wake the Oriya youths from their deep slumber. Some of the poems then published in *Sphulinga* (The flame), had stirred the youths of Orissa. They instilled hope and vigour of optimism :

Listen O' brother,
To weep and to die.
To get drowned and perish,
Is not man's destiny.
Man, born thou of immortal light,
Where is your death !
How can you die ? (Human brother)

She went on writing to infuse spirit and dynamism in the youths. "The historic fort of Barabati has kissed the dust, the magnificent Konark has crumbled, but the spirit of youth is there", she wrote. The poet believed, that drawing inspiration from the glorious past, they would lead the land to a greater glory.

The volume *Ahwan*, published in 1930, captures the spirit of Gandhiji's clarion call to people to join the struggle for freedom. The poet presents the ghastly miserable picture of the economic exploitation of the British, oppression by princes and zamindars, the dire poverty and misery of the masses, betrayal of the self-seekers, the exile and execution of patriots. She even urges women to plunge into the struggle heroically. The volume created a tremendous sensation; Kuntala's boldness of expression took the society by storms. The British government apprehending that these sparks of fire might flare up into conflagaration proscribed the book. With this, Kuntala's fame as a patriot and poet spread over the country.

Prem Chintamani was her last noteworthy poetic work. The volume evidently bears the stamp of maturity. The lyrics in the book were written at different periods. Chakradhar Mahapatra, whom the author loved as her son, wished to put them together, and arranged them to give a dramatic form. With a wonderful effect, it portrays the divine

dalliance of Radha and Krishna. There had been a tradition of writing on the theme based on Vaishnab philosophy left to us by women-poets like Madhavi, Vrindavati and Rani Nishankaroy. The hope and frustration, the joy and sorrow, the union and the separation of the divine pair are vividly depicted in the book. Devoid of erotic details of the earlier Vaishnab poets, it has a rare sweetness and charm of its own. As critics have observed, it could be a projection of Kuntala's own psyche, reflecting her agony and ecstasy, her hope and despire. Of course it is true that exceptionally rare devotees like Mira or Andal loved the Lord with an intensity and ardour, which is not possible for lesser mortals. It has been the singular concept of Hindu theology to see God in man and man in God.

The ultimate attainable goal of the devotee is the Lord. He is the essence of delight, beauty, bliss and all sweetness. He draws his devotees to Him by His own unspeakable charm. A constant yearning for Him is the path of devotion. The devotee in hope of His union feels delight and despair in being away from him. Just a glimpse of Him fills the being with blissful delight.

Ah ! unforgettable
Is the first sight,
When eyes fell
On the resplendent beauty of Shyama,
I forgot myself
And my existence here,
Lost all sense
Of family, of honour,
In a moment
I was blinded. (Prema Chintamani)

Kuntala accomplished this difficult and incredible feat to delineate the depth of such subtle feelings within her limitations of modern-day vocabulary. The earlier poets—Dinakrushna, Abhimanyu and Bhaktacharan—had depicted these thoughts and enriched Oriya literature with the advantage of the classical language at their disposal. The natural flow and lucidity of language in her lyrics brings to

mind what Gopal Praharaj, author of the monumental Oriya lexicon, obsérved : "Poetry was inherent in Kuntala, as is chirping and twittering to birds". The merits highlighted in the introduction to the book by Dr. Artaballabh Mohanty bears ample testimony to its worth.

In response to a challenge for writing *kavya* after the style of Radhanath and Gangadhar, Kuntala, laid her hands on *Mani Kanchan* basing it on Savitri-Satyavan story of the *Mahabharat*. This was, however, left incomplete. In *Gadajat Krusak* she gives the tragic life-story of a poor peasant crushed by social injustice.

The plight of Oriyas in Calcuttà had anguished her deeply and this made her write *Odiyanka Kandana* (Lament of the Oriyas) in a touchng language. Published on 1st April 1936, the day on which the new state of Orissa was born, it seemed to be Kuntala's swan-song.

Gopal Chandra Praharaj was prophetic in his utterance when he observed on Kuntala : "People in Orissa have not realised the life-blood she has infused into the Oriya language. It is left to posterity to judge it". In her first collection of poems, *Anjali*, was found the simplicity of a maiden heart holding aloft to the Lord a bunch of fresh flowers, washed in the morning dew. In her various moods she supplicates, complanits and surrenders to the Lord as her sole refuge. By her use of an articulate language in a simple metrical arrangement she has offered indefinite suggestions of beauty. The outside world stands apart and does not come in between her and the Lord in these direct communions. Her spontaneity and intense earnestness make her lyrics impressive and mark the unfolding of her poetic genius. In her writings that followed, she seems to be drawn by the all-pervading unknown at one time. A deep feeling for her country struggling for freedom seems to overpower her.

Radhanath Ray, the first modern Oriya poet, recounts the past glory of the land in his poetry. In Kuntala's poetry the long-suppressed discontents of this race that languished for ages find their utterance. Kuntala's poems with patriotic fervour first came out in her anthology *Archana* in 1927 and

she kept on singing to the nation, arousing people, for a decade culminating in 1937. She was swayed by the waves of nationalism and the new air blowing over India. The ignominy of a fallen race tormented her, and she gave it the message of hope : "This race is not destined to eternal doom. A crore and a half souls would rise, to tread the path to Immortality", echoing the message of the Upanishadic Rishi to the despondent man, "Srinwantu Viswe, Amritasya Putrah". She, through her moving lines, which were often eloquent and spirited, stirred the people to school them in self respect, and give them an awareness of national sentiment. The emotional fervour is high pitched, when the poet urges : "Forgo the pursuit of religions and their merits. Country is the one religion; the spinning-wheel is the dearest possession; Satyargraha is the one duty; and the prison is the heavenly paradise."

The poet's nostalgia for the magnificence of the bygone days surface in many of her poems. She does not wish men to revel in past glory as in a cosy bed of complacency, but wants them to use it as a spring-board to leap and rise high. Again, one feels dazed to think in what a rare feat of boldness could this poet, a woman, censure the mighty British at the height of their power : "Ill-fed and ill-clad, bent down with the burden of taxes, even wanting a pinch of salt for his morsel of rice, thirty three crore people have been rendered destitute. Missionaries, spending our purse to educate us, have kept ninety-five percent of people illiterate. Is it the achievement of rule of justice, of the ruler running the country for one century and a half? "The language of the poet may not be so direct and hard-hitting in most of her poems. Yet behind the language apparently soft and gentle, there seems to be a steel frame hidden somewhere; there was power and a quivering shadow of action and determination not to yield to a wrong. Though class-struggle appearing in poetry in the wake of socialism was not an issue on which Kuntala dwelt in her writings, but she did not spare the exploiter of the masses. "You sitting on high pedestal", she voices the feelings of the exploited, "cover your body and shame with the cloth I

weave. You sit on the white throne, I stand below in dust. With the Mandar Mountain of your pride, you have churned the ocean of my blood, and for a couple of days, revel in ambrosial delight."

Despair was her inseparable companion. She could echo Shelley's feelings, "I fall upon the thorns of life, I bleed.," One wonders if the suffering, inequality and injustice in the world around had ultimatily shaken the poet's firm and unyielding faith in God, landing her from her mystic height down to this real and sordid earth. The rebel in her cries out in *Gadjat Krusak* : "Poor Gokuli Nayak, you suffer and bear all injustice. Futile is your prayer to the deceitful God. Stone would remain stone. You paint it with vermillion and pray. Would it listen? You are deluded. These gods and the religion are all hostile to you. They exist to crush the poor". In lucidity of language and the pathos of realism, the *Gadjat Krusak* appears to be an exception. In the era, still dominated by the influence of Radhanath and Gangadhar, the *kavyas* were usually based on traditional themes drawn from mythologies. In response to a challenge Kuntala wrote *Mani Kanchan,* which she could not complete, and only the first few cantos were published in *Utkal Sahitya.* However if this is the last in the line of *kavyas* composed after the form and style of Gangadhar, Kuntala may also be credited as a pioneer of the realistic trend of Oriya poetry in her *Gadajat Krusak.*

Sachi Routray, a leading modern Oriya poet, notices her voice of revolt :

> Not only a woman, a mother or a poet
> Is she.
> A warrior in nation's battle,
> She gave the call as Bhairabi.
> First she held the sword, thereafter the pen,
> Hence, through the arteries of this land
> Her songs send a shivering thrill.
>
> (*Kuntala Kumari Jibana Charita*)

Between this love for her land and people, and the love for God, whose presence she could feel everywhere and in all

things, the entire gamut of Kuntala's poetic works appear to oscillate. From a very early age Kuntala had realised one God who is formless and at the same time has taken all forms that appear before eyes. Kuntala could be no stranger to the mystic consciousness expressed in various forms, symbols and languages in the Orissan religious literature, from *Sunyavad* of Buddhists to *Pinda-Brahmāndavād* of Vaishnabas and the *Alekh-Mahima* cult of Bhimabhoi. Rabindranath, in his *Jeevan-Smriti,* sums up this feeling as "union with the Infinite through all that is finite." More likely could have been the influence on her of the Brahmo religion which Kuntala had incidentally adopted, and of the wonderful poems of Bhaktakabi Madhusudan as well. His *Barnabodh* and the devotional poems happend to be the gateway to the Oriya language. They put the 'Parameswar' conception on the impressionable young minds. How succinctly he couches the Upanishadic thought in these words : "Farther than the farthest, beyond the ken of thought and words, closer than the closest, the life of all life." And the thought is echoed and re-echoed in Kuntala's lyrics :

In creepers and leaves
In flowers and fruits
In water and land
In sky and air
Floating is the Form of the Formless,
Secretly enchanting your life! (Akule)

And again,

I seek Him
Everywhere on Earth,
But within me
He lives,
Whole Universe
Manifests in Him,
Yet His image
My heart reflects. (Sari)

Her songs have often become direct communications, as she was irresistibly drawn by the Supreme, and was in a state of divine frenzy. As she wrote many of these under

inspiration, and she had never cultivated poetry as an art, flaws could be marked in its rhythm, form and presentation on occasions. But it had been her nature to give a free expression to her feelings, and her poems moved in an unrestraiend flow. So aptly observes M. Mansingh, a poet and critic, "After reading Kuntala's poem, from the beginning to the end, one feels as if a woman's throbbing heart is drifting in a flow. Her feminine heart is yearning to express itself, heedless of the fact, to whom it does. In *Uchhwas* she first opened her heart to the star, to Sephali and Kamini flowers; and then to her country, to Nature, and finally to God, the creator. As a flautist moving her fingers on the flute hits the right tune he seeks, Kuntala while singing on various themes, came to God. And it touched a chord in her heart resulting in a melody which attuned her entire being and enchanted all her life'. This is the temper of her muse which pervades her poetry. Her verse is an attempt to make her own poetry out of fragments of this great poem of life. She has made use of articulate language in metrical arrangement, so as to execute indefinite suggestions of beauty. Music and poetry seem wedded in her lyrics. Perhaps in none of her great contemporaries the lyrical faculty was so paramount—whether one considers her minor songs, her threnody or her longer poem *Prema Chintamani*. One may refer to Bhaktakavi Madhusudan as loftier, but Kuntala stands out as the most spontaneous singer of her time.

She has clarified and refreshed Oriya verse ignoring much of the picturesque yet confusing tangle of ornamental undergrowth, bringing a flexibility and grace to her language. Her varied approach and her shifting moods offer a poignant testimony to the conflict in her soul. In life, nourished in the school of adversity, the sadness of her thoughts has produced a hymn of surrender, being offered to her Lord :

> Sorrow is my friend, my comrade,
> the dweller of my heart;
> In the sanctum of heart's altar,
> Sorrow is my floral-offering. (Desire)

But then she never wished the shadow of her gloom to rest upon others :

> I won't sing
> Of sadness,
> to mar
> The hapy days
> And times pleasant.
> Putting together
> My heart's broken strings
> I shall tune my lyre
> To sweet melody. (In spring)

She perceives beauty, and then sees the ephemeral aspect of it, remembering how swiftly the joys of the earth disappear. Her ultimate faith in the Lord and the immortality of her soul have lent a spirit of optimism to her poems, and yet there seems to be a mild under-current of sad note, a strain of gentle melancholy. Then, again, we observe in her poems, particularly in *Prema Chintamani*, how she weaves her remorse in a texture of beauty. She is the lover and not the sensualist, and her mind moved in subtle supra-physical domains, yearning for her Lord. This intense longing and its ardour, the rapturous delight of the heart in union and the accompanying *bhāvas* of the traditional Vaishnab poets bereft of their descriptions of the gross physical aspects of union, are marvellously depicted by her.

In nature, and all its creations she could see the face of God. The sight of a flower would touch a chord in her and would transport her to Wordsworthian delight. It moved her and evoked emotional responses. Thus her poetry, in some degree, reveal all the romantic traits : "Love of nature, love of beauty, imagination, love of past and a wearied sadness". Kuntala's quest for the Unknowable, her frequent excursions to the mystic land have, in the wake of Bhaktakavi Madhusudan, produced a host of poems that had enriched Oriya literature. Besides the beauty in form, texture or language, its depths and heights would yet remain somewhat beyond the ken of the reader. Apt in this respect would be what Professor K. R. S. Iyengar observes on the

mystic poems of Sri Aurobindo : "Spiritual experiences being *per se* ineffable are for that very reason incommunicable through the medium of our everyday vocabulary. And yet such experiences are dear to the heart of man, and he would gladly clutch at the intangible and capture and retain it (if he could) as a part of himself. That is why we cherish in our heart's tabernacle revelations like Francis Thompson's 'The Hound of Heaven' or Sri Aurobindo's 'Rose of God' and 'Thought the paraclete'. We love them, we cherish them, we tap them from time to time to drawforth momentary solace—but do we understand them in every crevice or sense the significance of every turn of thought and every shade of colour? We do attempt to reproduce intellectually the poet's spiritual experience, but the images that we construct, in our minds will be but a lifeless facade a grandiose proxy bloated with mere mental stuff; the experience as such is unfortunately denied to most of us, and hence we blink pathetically in our bewilderment when the poet describes the thrills he has braved. the splendours he has glimpsed, the vast beautitudes he has braved. the splendours he has glimpsed, the vast beautitudes he has been". Man, God and Nature are the eternal themes of poetry. Kuntala's patriotic songs, the call to her countrymen, that once quickened the beatings of their heart, were mostly for the times in which she lived. But her oneness with Nature, her noble sentiments and her feeling for the sublime have given her poems a universal appeal.

4

Her Prose

The day 'Ode to Sephali' was published, Kuntala bought a bundle of saris. As she gave them away to poor women, tears ran down her cheeks. Turning to her grandma she said, "I recall how every alternate day after my return from Medical School you washed my only sari and dried it. A friend in my class asked if I had only one sari, and I could not answer. Another friend saved the situation explaining that I did not like to show and display and all her saris were of one colour. But the curious friend marked it with a copying pencil without my knowledge. It could not, however, escape your notice. What pains I took that day to erase the mark with lemon, soda and detergents I don't remember. Today God has enabled the same Kuntala to donate saris." Grandma had a broad mind. She wiped Kuntala's tears and said, "This, my dear, is the way of the world". What had prevented Kuntala to ask somebody to buy a sari for her was a sense of self-respect, and a determination to stand on one's own, a characteristic trait of the middle class, whom she knew so well. In all ages this class is perhaps most affected by the customs, traditions and the values of a society, and is more crushed in the wheels of social changes and reforms. This is the class of petitbourgeoisie that is often forgotten or despised by the Marxists. Kuntala identified herself with this class, shared their joys and sorrows, and she tried to distil the essence of all that in her novels.

Poetry still flourished in that period, and the poems varied from long pieces as Radhanath's *Mahayatra* to the most delicate songs and lyrics. Fakirmohan, considered to be the father of Oriya fiction, was known as Vyasakavi. Fiction was yet to become the dominant form of literature. Kuntala published learned articles in *Utkal Sahitya* and

Sahakar. The writings could be on such diverse topics as Socialism in USSR and India, Evolution of Hindi literature, Problems of religion in the modern day, or Keshav Chandra Sen and Brahmo Samaj. During her stay in Delhi Kuntala made an extensive study of Hindi literature, and presided over conferences delivering her address in Hindi. Her books *Nari, Jagaran, Satitwa, Sadin,* and poems *Dilka Darad* and *Param Premik* all written and published in Hindi, made her name familiar among the Hindi-speaking people. But while in far off Delhi, Kuntala always felt to have left her heart in Orissa. The land and its people occupied all her thoughts and dreams. Her writings of this period, published in *The Samaj* and *Sahakār* under the title 'Delhi-letters', an open and candid exposition of her meditations, reveal the intensity of her love and concern for Oriyas. These letters contained discourses on integration of the Oriya tracts, poverty of the Oriya people, abolition of untouchability, ancient history and national pride and a variety of issues concerning Orissa. One who runs through the pages of these letters would realise the persistent problems that had beset Kuntala's mind. She once wrote "To suffuse the hearts of mothers and sisters in every home with love, kindness and understanding, wound be my endeavour. To rise in life cannot be my only goal. My endeavour shall be to serve the people through literature, through education, through charity, through treatment of the ailing, and by whatever means possible to raise this nation, and to build noblemen. I am determined particularly for total abolition of all superstitions". This had been the testament of Kuntala's life. All her literary works, her profession and in fact her entire life, were consciously aimed to achieve this end.

The novel as a form of literature first appeared in Oriya in the second half of the nineteenth century. In 1888 Umesh Chandra Sarkar brought out the first Oriya novel *Padmamali.* Two years later Ramsankar wrote *Bibasini.* Both the novels were based on history. *Bhimabhuyan* of Gopalballabha, claimed as the first ever fiction in Indian literature, based on the life of tribal people made a new beginning of a different sort. Then came Fakirmohan who gave a faithful

picture of the contemporary Orissan society. His works are marked for their social awareness, reformist view, comprehensive language and living characters. Chintamani Mohanty, whose novels grew in the shadow of Fakirmohan's writings, had nothing remarkable about them. Fakirmohan wrote novels in the latter part of his mature life, mellowed with varied experiences, and this gave a seasoned tinge to his characters. Kuntala wrote all the novels in her twenties, and unlike the nobility and the serf forming the main characters in Fakirmohan's works, she in all her five novels chose to portrary the middle class, thus making quite a bold departure from her predecessors. It would appear that in Kuntala's short yet crowded life her writing, and her work for her people, and the society whose reforms was her sole objective, seemed to go together. Untouchability, childmarriage widowhood, exploitation and oppression of women in society were the problems that tormented her mind. By exposing the evils of a society ridden with superstition and ignorance, she revolted against them. In the true spirit of a physician, Kuntala prescribes the panacea for the ills from which the society suffered.

Strange though it may appear, it was not an anthology of her poems, but a novel *Bhranti* (Delusion), with which Kuntala made her debut, in 1923. One has the glimpse in it of the portrait of a family-life. A childhood love steadily growing over the passing time gets a jolt through misunderstanding. This is followed by separation, ultimate reconciliation and marriage. Nothing novel can be traced in this tragi-comedy. The book, however, makes a pleasant reading. Apparent reticence and deliberate use of florid language have partly camouflaged her thoughts. Of course her later novels show a marked departure from this.

Na-tundi has in it a lively sense of humour. The girl Ratani is bad-tempered and quarrelsome like her mother. But courage is the good trait which she has in abundance. Thus she finally marries Zamindar Krishnachandra, a benevolent reformer and is transformed into Ratnavati, an accomplished housewife. Ratani appears to be the female counterpart of Fakirmohan's Ananta, the bold truant. The

drastic change in Ratani's life reminds one of Shakespeare's, 'The Taming of the Shrew'. Kuntala shows an unshakable faith in man's innate goodness. She also carries the conviction that this goodness would finally prevail. She is daringly unconventional in creating a noble Zamindar Krushnachandra Routray, when zamindars were considered to be the symbols of exploitation and oppression.

Kalibohu (The dark bride) is a social novelette based on child-marriage. Laxmi is made to marry at seven, and at the age of ten she becomes a widow. Then follows her pathetic life of torture. Kuntala came across many such cases in the society and was anguished. She had her full support for Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar's widow-marriage. She had also actively supported H. B. Sarada's campaign leading to the well-known Sarada Act for the abolition of child marriage. In course of the novel, Chandrodaya, an ideal youngman, comes forward to marry Laxmi. Laxmi, who otherwise may have ended her life in a brothel, lives an exemplary life serving the society.

In *Parasamani*, Lalita marries Bimbadhar, a clerk in the town. Though Bimbadhar has a rented house, it is unlikely for the wife to stay in town neglecting the senior in-laws. So Lalita, despite the worst treatment meted out to her from the members of the house, devotes herself entirely to their service. She has lost the love of Bimbadhar, who goes astray and meets an untimely death. However, Lalita ultimately succeeds in winning the hearts of all by her patience and sincere service. The indication is clear—that not men, but women often become the worst enemy of women. Patience and diligence prevail in the long run to overcome all hostility.

Raghu Arakhit (Raghu, the destitute) is a full length novel considered to be Kuntala's most successful work of fiction. It was based on a true story, which struck and deeply impressed her during her professional visits to a family. Raghu, an orphan, wanders about and is luckily helped by capricious destiny at all stages. He grows rich and is established in society. Unfortunately he becomes a widower and suffers the pang of loneliness. He tries, but fails to

marry his childhood sweetheart Sita, who in the meanwhile has lost her husband also. So far the story runs true. Even the names of Chandra Sekhar, Saraswati, Piteinani, Raghunath and Sita are not fictitious. Kuntala however does not like to put an end here, and the story moves on, from orissa to Calcutta and far off Burma, the places she knows so well.

Kuntala shows in it the promises of a successful novelist. Fatalism and idealism appear to be the two important traits of the novel and also its two flaws. Fate has intervened to give the story a dramatic effect. But fate could be welcome in the novel only as a casual visitor and not a regular one. A dejected and frustrated Raghunath plunging headlong into the service of the country seems over-idealistic.

Kuntala's novels are set on a broad canvas ranging from remote villages of Orissa to the metropolis of Calcutta; and far off Burma, where she spent a part of her childhood. In her works one finds lively sketches of those distant lands in patches, since her mind often slipped into the grove of her native place.

Along the lines of Fakirmohan, who had been the standard-bearer before her in the field of Oriya fiction, Kuntala mostly used the spoken language. But the literary and colloquial are also interspersed befitting the speaker and the occasion. Occasionally it borders on the rhetoric, but is comprehensive being free from cliches or jargons.

Women in her novels stand out in bold relief. She was a woman, who had access not only to the inner chambers of the zenana, but to the innermost recesses of their hearts. She knew of their smiles, their tears, the pangs of a black bride, the heart-burns of a child-widow, more than any other. She was aware of the significant role of women in a ideal family and society, and believed in the adage that she who rocks the cradle rules the world. For the woman alone, the home could be a hell, and she again can put the house in order; and by her tolerance and sacrifice, as Lalita in the novel *Parasamani*, turn the home into a heaven. Female characters in her novel could be broadly categorised into the noble and benevolent, the oppressed and tortured, the

self-centred and villainous, the rich and epicurean types. Her emphasis on the female characters is obvious. Perhaps none in pre-independent India thought and worked so much for the cause of Orissa's women.

On the other hand the male characters in her novels look different. Some aristocrats of the land-lord class are of the usual type one finds in Fakirmohan's novels. But otherwise they in her works have neither vigour, nor vitality. They are often shown as timid and fatalist. They lack courage to confront crucial situations. One fancies how she could have made Raghu, her hero in *Raghu Arakhit,* fight his way out of adverse circumstances revealing his manliness, instead of making him a favoured child of the destiny. A few of them are idealists who fight against exploitation and injustice. They want to reform society, and advocate the regeneration of women. Says one such character: "It is the woman-power who as Ghosa voiced the sacred hymns of the *Rik;* as Maitreyee, fathomed the depths of subtle metaphysics; conquered death in the form of Savitri; as Sita she caused to split this earth; it is she again, the tempestuous Chandi who trampled the demon Mahisha; and she is Radha, the love incarnate; she is Saraswati, the epitome of knowledge; and Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth; she is your mother, your sister. Let her be with you in your field of work; she would infuse vitality in you, and lend her power and grace to your work. India, the sleeping lion would, rise". Circumstances kept her away from Orissa for many years. Yet Kuntala had a keen knowledge of Oriya family. Thus her works happen to be a faithful mirror of Orissa's typical villlage life showing their customs, rituals, festivities, day to day life, the conference and gossip of women in the bathing-ghat—everything vivid and in its true colours. The area in which she seemed to possess a definite edge over others was in the delineation of mutual love-hate relations and interactions among various members of a complex joint family. She had a closer view of things, and gave the readers an intimate picture of the conjugal love, the typical relations of bride and her in-laws, relations between wives of brothers among

co-wives, problems that polygamy entails, the purdah system and the plight of widows in those days.

Nationalism has been a dominant trait and runs through all her prose writings. She beckoned people to follow the Mahatma in the struggle for India's freedom. She also urged the people to work selflessly for the development of Orissa, a very neglected land. India was her heart and Orissa her soul, it seemed. They were complementary. In *Raghu Arakhit*, while the author narrates Raghunath's joining the 'Vande Mataram' agitation for the country, she suggests him not to forget Orissa. "Go back to the sacred land of Utkal, the land of hallowed Neelachal. Your mother is she. She is entitled to your service. Removing her misery is your foremost duty. The novel evokes and arouses patriotic feeling, at times hampering the art of the novel.

Kuntala's own life had been a saga of struggle, of success and achievement too, but a peaceful and happy family life was denied to her by destiny. If humour is the salt of life, she needed an extra pinch of it to make life bearable. And in her novels one finds lively effusions of wit and humour. She satires the aping of the western way of life, and the hybridization of one's dress and manners under the influence of an alien culture. In the characterization of Dibakar in *Raghu Arakhit* she writes "Observing Dhakoi dhoti, perfumed kerchief, Laliski banyon, Western wrist-watch, and cigarette-pipe held in the mouth, it is hard to distinguish if he is Bengali-Oriya or Oriya-Bengali. His name is Dibakar Mishra. But he always styles himself as D. Mishar". In the same novel, the description of the tout Sekhar Choudhury, the villain in a religious garb, makes an interesting reading: "He would not even touch water until the performance of his regular sandhya-puja is completed. Paste of sandal was liberally applied over his chest and forehead. In speech, he would punctuate each clause with Hari-Siva".

It fatalism initiates a dramatic turn of events in her works, there also appears to be more of idealism at the expense of realism. As a visionary she dreamt of an ideal society a concomitant of an ideal family. Though tit for tat or tooth for a tooth are not the ways of God, who is kind and

forgiving, the society afraid of its derailment puts this demand of poetic justice on the writer. Abundance of her humanity has often made a knave or rogue in her novel escape the retributive justice. The happy remarriage of Phulamanjari, a widow could be no sin or cause of repentance in Kuntala's eyes, though this contravened the then accepted norms of morality. This deviation on the part of a woman in that age is a hall-mark of her courage. The sublime humanism brings to one's mind the 'Scarlet letter' of Hawthrone. She frequently brooded over the magnificent and elegant past and felt sad before the presence of the relics of past grandeur. Something of this cultivation of the glorious past appeared in her novels. She was not so much concerned with class-struggle, as with the struggle to overcome weakness in man's nature—the struggle within man's soul. In a setting of her own times, she gave an authentic portrayal of familiar contemporary situations of snobberies, social cruelties, complascent humbug and the village chronicles of Orissa. Like Dickens she attacked the social conditions of her time. But her strength lay in the knowledge of the human heart, in the delineation of the shades of sentiment as they shift and change, and the cross-purposes which play with emotions, and trouble the mind. Content with her middle-class figures, she combined clarity of narration with skill in dialogue and delightful reading. If she did not excel in fiction, it was because she did not cultivate the craft to its perfection. Also equally true of her novels, is the view on Charlotte Bronte, left to us by Ifor Evans: "Her work is grounded in realism, but goes beyond into a wish-fulfillment". Speaking on her novels, Sarala Devi, a leading contemporary writer of her times rightly observed : "Her novels have an irresistible impact upon the unlettered women of Orissa. Her essays and other prose writings influenced the society of educated and cultured women as well. And as long as modern developments have not improved the masses, as long as the existing social millieu is not fully changed, the impact of her novels would be there. A deserving encomia to the works of one, who in her own way was peerless."

5

Contributions : An Assessment

With no tears, no dying words but a contented smile on her lips Kuntala left this world, justifying what she had once written in a triumphant gesture :

> When death stares at me
> With sinister gaze,
> I shall court it
> With dignity,
> And not submit helplessly.

Her exit was untimely and sudden, when she was at the peak of her fame. Condolence messages poured in from all sides and obituary columns in Oriya papers were filled with tributes to her. *The Asha* wrote : "Kuntala had in her an assortment of all virtues one comes across in human society. Her adored memory the nation would always fondly cherish." Being spirited she was immensely inspired by the powerful words of Vivekananda. His remarkable meassage to the young people of India that, coming to this world they should so act as to leave behind their footprints, had thrilled her to the core. The words constantly reverberated in her mind, and became her motto. She too, in a poem entitled 'Footprints', urged the youth to boldly march on leaving their footprints on their way. Like her Boswell, Chakradhar Mohapatra has left an intimate and near-exhaustive biography. Her life had been a 'web of a mingled yarn.' She had both idealism and pragmatism at the same time. She was charitable and compassionate and yet could be an uncompromising rebel. Realism and idealism, romanticism and mysticism contended with each other in her works. In her poetry she sang of the country and the common flower, and brought into it the divine and the common man. These enigmatic aspects of her life made her a baffling personality.

Kuntala won honour and recognition in an ample measure which could be the envy of any woman. Then what more could life give her ? But 'Nalpe Sukhamasti' had been her life's philosophy. Like the last flicker of the lamp before being extinguished, comments her biographer, a hundred high hopes and fancies had burgeoned in her mind and were blown up like water-bubbles. Had her attitude not been of surrendered resignation to the divine, she could as well say that, "immortal longings are in me". Kailash, her philosopher and guide, advised her to lead a life of rigid austerity. But "I have no liking or attraction", she could almost ditto the great poet of her time Rabindranath's thoughts, "for the ascetic view of life, the abstention from its joys and sensations". How could she, a single woman, in her age journey through life alone? After the heartbreak affair she strayed into an incompatible marriage. True to the ideals of an Indian wife she made all efforts not to displease her husband. She had to practically resign from a promising literary career and concentrate more on her practice for making money. She even had to forego many invitations to grace literary functions in consideration of her husband's feelings. Her obsession with the glorious past of Orissa made her name the two daughters as Utkal-Kumari and Kalinga-Kumari. She had decided to name her son as Jaganmohan, much earlier to its birth after a deity considered by Oriyas as their own.

After the end of her struggling student career, when she entered the medical profession, she used to stay in a large multi-storey building at Cuttack. Daily in the sun-set hour she would climb up to the top floor, and the view across the river Kathajuri offered a splendid sight. She would look at Devi-dwar, Saptasajya, Naraj and Bidanasi. These were the places associated with fabulous past of Orissa's history. And she would then lapse into a reverie. Alas! what happened to Orissa after fighting battles for hundreds of years? She would often ponder and break into tears. It was told that Madhusudan Das, the grand old man and architect of modern Orissa used to visit the historic Barabati fort not far from his residence at Cuttack. And looking at it, the

mute witness of a heroic past, he would have similar feelings bringing tears to his eyes. Incidentally Kuntala, more than any other person, was radically vociferous like Madhusudan regarding the legitimate claims of the Oriya people. Wrongly set against the paramount cause of country's independence by some leaders, it was a highly sensitive issue. Kuntala was so much enamoured of the unique heritage of Orissa, that she could not tolerate any criticism of it. She was convinced that Kalinga, though a part and parcel of India and shared its civilisation, had yet an individuality in its art, music and aesthetics.

The interest of the nation was always uppermost in Kuntala's mind, to which her own interest and everything else were subservient. Thus she was not happy when it was suggested that Prof. Bijoy Chandra Mazumdar would write a foreword to her collection of poems entitled *Archana*. It should have been gratifying to her that Prof. Mazumdar had placed young Kuntala's 'Tara prati' (Ode to a star) in the esteemed 'Typical Selections from Oriya Literature' of Calcutta University. In the preface to the above selections Prof. Mazumdar had made certain improper remarks against Upendra Bhanj, the great Oriya poet, and against the Oriya race. So Kuntala immediately wrote to the Professor, that he had committed a sacrilege in condemning Bhanja, and alleging Oriyas lacking principles. These were utterly baseless, she wrote. The Oriyas have for centuries fought agaisnt the Pathans, Moghuls and British inviting ultimate ruin to themselves, just to keep up principles. And when this fact would find due recognition, and the place it merits in the history of the world, Prof. Mazumdar's unfounded conjecture based on envy, would be blown up like water-bubbles. A chastened professor replied apologetically assuring to expunge the objectionable remarks in the next edition. And then only did Kuntala agree to have the foreword to her book written by him.

She was extremely liberal in her religious views, and boldly adopted the faith which she found to be closer to her heart. From Christianity she changed herself to Brahmo and finally to Sanatan Hinduism. She said of Christ with

deep reverence; "Who else in the history of the world sacrificed his life for humanity? Several days and nights have I wept, pondering on him. But did he say anywhere to spread Christianity by condemning and belittling other faiths? Never". And her faith as an Indian rings today with an added relevance : "I was born in a Christian family, but I am an Indian. I could never reconcile myself to the absurdity that not the history and mythology of India but those of the West should be mine. I could never approve my brothers being given un-Indian names like Samuel and Nithaneal." What led to the conversion of Jagannath to Janathan forms a part of the theme in her incomplete fiction *Chitrapata*. She used to think about the essential amity among the people of three major religions—Hindus, Muslims and Christians. She worshipped the image of Jagannath as 'Apānipāda Brahma', the Form symbolising the Formless.

She was no lotus-eater of the contemplative school of poets. She knew that words were not enough and that they must display themselves in generous gesture and gallant risk. Whether it is an Oriya Nidhiram Misra in distant Simla or Oriyas in the Karachi-congress stranded having no fare to return home, or even the well-known respectable Bhaswani family of U. P. — she went out of her way to lend them her helping hand. She alone ventured to provide asylum to the revolutionaries Bhagabati Saran and Durgavati. When a British officer ordered to forcibly carry away Durgavati's child from her arms, she had flashed a knife and with a lightning-speed killed her child and herself before the police could lay hands on any of them. Kuntala also led the procession carrying Durgavati's dead body. Police wanted to arrest Kuntala on this issue but a large gathering of her admirers crowded around her place. And the wives of senior police officers cordoned her. Again on another occasion when she delivered a fiery speech in a large meeting of Delhi majdoors, her arrest was ordered. As she smilingly courted arrest, the news circulated forthwith. She was heaped with flower garlands. Immediately the wife and daughter of a police top-brass arrived on the scene. And then came the wives of magistrates and other high officials.

The police had to leave the scene. The ladies escorted her to her residence. They appealed to Kuntala to desist from courting arrest in future, as her absence would add to their suffering. She won the confidence of all her patients, who confided their secrets to her. This had enabled her to bring to right path many girls of good families who had strayed into the alluring and immoral profession of making fast buck through massage-parlours. In the rush and whirl of Delhi, a decade of her life was packed with several activities of her charity and courage.

Her husband Krishna Prasad has summed up her Delhi-chapter posthumously in these words : "It is no small honour for an Oriya woman to be unanimously elected as Chairperson of the committee which was formed to give a concrete shape and recognition to famous Sarada Act by Harbilas Sarada, its architect. Consequently she had to tour the whole of Delhi and Punjab. As women in Orissa had idolised her, women in those far off villages of northern India had also loved her with equal ardour. The Jain Samaj, University of Allahabad and Benaras Hindu University invited her to deliver addresses. Her lecture as the President of the Aligarh Student Federation got wide publicity in the local press. In 1937 on the occasion of Jhansi Rani Laxmi Bai anniversary at Gwalior, she hit the headlines by making a bold speech. But she always spoke from a constructive view point. Her language, though 'spirited', was pregnant with thought and gravity for which the police failed to implicate her with charges of sedition." (*Kuntala Kumari Jibana Charita* by Chakradhar Mohapatra p. 297).

She was swayed by the storms and stresses of the period. And inside her there was turmoil. Many of her poems bear poignant testimony to the conflict in her soul. She loved tradition, and in her own dress, manners and way of life she was a typical Oriya woman of the aristocratic families of her times. But in her thought and outlook she was much ahead of her times. Her sari covered a part of the head. She was always escorted by some one while visiting her patients. But she was against the prevailing purdah system. Addressing a large congregation of women in Sarola, she

explained, "Goddess Parvati is the mother of the Universe. We all see her, and she does not conceal behind a veil. In the *Ramayan* we she that when Sita was brought honourably escorted to Rama's presence she was veiled, and the warrior monkeys wanted to see her, for whom they had so valiantly fought. Lord Rama bade her to appear in public view. His words on this occasion are significant. He said that the cover of a wall, a curtain, a house or palanquin is not the keeper of a woman's modesty. It is the honour of the husband which guards the wife's modesty." Addressing the conference of women at Berhampur she reminded them that they were the Shakti, the Power. Unless they rise, India cannot move ahead. As long as women remain behind purdah enslaved by men, the Shakti would remain dormant and inert, and no progress is possible. She congratulated hundreds of Andhra women present in the meeting. She said that the women of the South had come forward, and they indeed would take the lead of Indian women. Kuntala indulged in the youth's prerogative of dreaming; She also strived for doing soemthing tangible. She had a scheme of mass education, in which each person who was educated would make four other persons literate, She launched the scheme, starting with the poorest and most backward people of the locality, during her stay at Cuttack. She left Orissa with a vow to amass one lakh rupees and return devoting herself to education and upliftment of the Oriya women. She too was a visionary who projected her thouhts far ahead of her times. In a letter to Kanak Manjari, describing the future relations of men and women, she wrote, that in the beginning mankind was based on two genders, male and female. In course of time the woman becomes a mother, a daughter, a sister and a wife. So also the man a father, a son, a brother and a husband. Time has come when, just as relations exist among men themselves and among the women too, the relation between a man and a woman would be that of a friend—a comrade. This, visualised by a woman of India more than fifty years ago, remains even today a concept of the 'Brave New World'. She too had the heart of a mother, compassionate and charitable. She could hear the

call of the distressed. She would distribute new clothes to beggars, and would often give away her own. If she heard sombody asking for food, she would rise form her table, give away her own dish; and at times had to go without a meal. It was a pleasure for her to help the needy students, and many used to depend on her regular succour. From the age of twenty-one till her end, she had helped countless needy people, and no one who approached her in trouble was ever disappointed.

Coming to the capital city of Delhi, she also had success in her field as a physician, and had immense popularity. But life moving in placid grooves and little peripheral activities left her unsatisfied. She edited *Stribhusan* in Hindi. She regularly published writings of several Oriya women in Hindi translation which brought her recognition in central India. Monthlies like *Jeevan, Manmauji, Nari* and *Bharati* had come under her able editorship. She also edited *Prabasi Oriya* published from Calcutta. She went on producing inspiring articles to enkindle the lamps of liberty. After her book *Ahwan* was proscribed, the other book of poems named *Ahuti* also could not see the light of the day. Following the execution of Saheed Bhagat Singh, she wrote a poem in English as a tribute to the great martyr. Thousands of printed copies of the poem were distributed in the Karachi session of the Congress. Her Oriya poem felicitating the noted linguist Grierson, along with its translation, was brought out by Calcutta University. When Gandhiji indignantly reacted to Miss Katherine Mayo's *Mother India* and called it a 'drain-inspector's report', Kuntala wrote out a rejoinder to the infamous book, in the form of a poem entitled 'Narishakti', published in *Sphulinga*. Thus she went on her literary pursuits, and a revolutionary ferment remained alive in her works. Her pen never ceased writing.

Kuntala's incomplete last letter, written to her confidant and biographer Chakradhar Mohapatra, discovered posthumously, provides a glimpse to the poet's unique personality. It reveals how she, a woman from Orissa, had fully let herself merge in the cosmopolitan mainstream of the capital maintaining her racial identity. She wrote, "I

have lived in Delhi a pretty long time, for the last ten years. Whoever thought that from a remote corner of Orissa I would come to spend a whole decade at this place : Thousands of Bengali families, hundreds of families of Gujarati, Maharastrian. Telugu and Madrasi communities are here. But ours is the single Hindu Oriya family—the father, mother and children, all. The sacred idol of Lord Jagannath is worshipped at home where the language spoken is Oriya—and you feel the Orissan life and culture—the home of Utkal Kumari, Kalinga Kumari and Jaganmohan, the temple—like solitary island in this Moghul-capital, Delhi. You look bắck to the past, into the entire history, and antiquity of India. You will not meet with a single instance, when one dwelt here, with all the unique features of an Oriya family, with the heart-beat of Oriyas so perfectly synchronised and attuned with the psyche of the native inhabitants of the Moghul capital—Indian and Orissan, Hindu and Sanatani, possessing together the local Hindi culture of the region and the native Oriya culture. This is a historical truth." Mangaldev Sastri wrote a story entitled 'Lady Doctor' wherein was reflected Kuntala's life. The noted Hindi writer Jainendra Kumar based his novel *Kalyani* on Kuntala's life. "She was a physician by profession, but a real poet by nature" observed Jainendra Kumar.

Her biographer Chakradhar Mohapatra made a passing assessment of Kuntala's exceptional talents : "In whatever part of the world she could happen to be, she would be honoured and admired. She was in possession of all virtues in ample measure. Even placed in Western metropolis of America or London, she could shine and make her mark. In her treatment of the female-diseases she wielded a miraculous hand and had few parallels. She could try and acquire command over any language in ten days' time. Such brilliance is truly amazing. Her charity and sweetness of nature, her knowledge and poetic talent, service and efficiency as physician, her humanity and sense of national pride all put together made this woman a marvel in creation. To see her is to adore. "The glowing achievements and dynamism of this modest lady had almost dazed the women

around her. Satyavati, the daughter of Swami Shradhananda, once held her dearly and blurted out, "All that you have attained at such a young age is awfully surprising !" Kuntala's immediate reply was : "My work has come to its end. My days are almost over." Obviously the poet had the premonition of her end. But ardent optimism and vaulting hopes had never deserted her. Yet influenced by theosophy she had her meanderings of births in the past and the future. She too had her moments of doubt and despair and lapsed occasionally to moods of ambivalence. Like other women of her time, she must have in her eventful life faced the same human problems. Perhaps she would have found herself entangled in the same emotional and moral conflicts in her relation with others and with herself. But what distinguished this poet, was an intense and glowing passion which filled her life with sweet deeds of charity.

She was obviously not of the world's ordinary coinage. She was minted of a different and rare variety. Despite her human frailties she appears to be a denizen, not so much of this material world, as of another. Kuntala in her poems has often pointed to a future immortality . Shelley too revealed his belief in some kind of immortality, when he wrote. "I silently laugh, at my own cenotaph". Nashe's pithy couplet brings home almost the same idea :

> Heaven is our heritage
> Earth but a player's stage. (Adieu)

Kuntala echoes a similar feeling in the lines :

> To wither and perish
> Is not my ultimate end,
> In that heavenly garden
> Shall I eternaly blossom.
>
> (Ode to Sephali)

She was assured of her eternal existence in the heavenly abode. Being aware of the brevity of her fugitive earthly existence she had filled her life with noble deeds and nobler thoughts for her country men and left behind to them her incomparable literary bequest. She would continue to live in their memory.

Excerpts from Kuntala's Verse

When grief sorrounds me

When dreadful dark clouds of grief
Come encircling,
Let not panic and despondency
Engulf me.
When tears profusely run down my cheeks
Like rain,
Let there be no lament of misery.

When death stares at me
In its sinister gaze,
I shall court it
With dignity
And not submit helplessly.

Remove Thou,
All my bondage of despair,
Let not the pain of myriad thorns
Evoke in me a cry.

'Sphulinga'

He comes

My eyes have never seen him
Only the heart feels
Where is He, in which remote land
Yet he draws the mind.
In blossoms of the early spring,
In sweet-scented soothing breeze,
I feel His name signed
On creepers and leaves.
His night and day
I yearn for Him ceaselessly
Finding no trace.
I called Him not,
Of His own He comes,
I feel Him, in heart's achings
In the warm tears of my eyes,
As flash of lightning in dark clouded sky
He comes a moment, to vanish in the next,
And I seek Him in cities,
In the woods, gardens and meadows.
I have not been earnest,
It is He who calls.
His mysterious charm pulling me
Yokes to His lotus-feet.
In bright autumn moonlight
When mind gets lost in His love
He comes, a while
Dispelling all darkness from my heart
In His glow of effulgence.

'Anjali'

My crest-jewel

Sakhi, can I keep him away?
I may lose the life-breath,
Light may go out of my eyes,
Even the moon, stars and the sun
Might sink in eternal darkness,
Flower may forget its sweet smell and glow,
Gold would lose its bright yellowness,
The sky becomes bereft of its blue
And the blood sheds its red hue;
My life is laid at His feet
And those lotus-feet be mine
In this birth and hereafter,
In the lives to come.
Let people call all names to Shyam,
Crooked, a young blackguard,
Let him put me in deadly anguish
And be happy with another;
What if people censure!
Sakhi, he alone is my crest-jewel.

'Prema Chintamani'

Nara-Narayan

Eagerly waiting for Thee
To pass this way
All were sleepless, the whole night
Keeping their doors ajar.
Above in the sky,
A fair of heavenly lights,
The charming play of moon and clouds,
The grand canopy stretching to horizon.
Myriad stars performing *mangala alati*
Earth offering blooming flowers
With their spreading of sweet perfume
Enrapturing the heart.

To have a glimpse of Thee
The world kept vigil
Atmosphere filled with scented *malaya* breeze
Birds sweetly singing Thy hymns
With its newly grown rice, green duba grass and *chandan*
The earth offered its worship.

Nobody could really know
The path which you took,
Wearing the garb of the poor and lowly
Thou moved from door to door incognito,
Shedding dusts of Thy holy feet,
Begging, to fill Thy tattered bag with alms
Pouring Thy blessed love.
No one recognised Thou,
God, in man's guise.

'Sphulinga'

Evil lotus

Many are the garlands I weave
To tear away and crush in my palms,
Shedding warm tears of agony,
Is there anything
Lovelier than flowers
To adorn against gold ?

What love is,
Do I know ?
Only an excruciating ache
Rising secretly inside
Is killing me.
My mind moving astray
At times turns awfullly restless,
I roll on the ground madly,
Again sit meditating on him.

Some hit me with their wood-shafts,
Their jeering saws my heart ;
The more I refuse to bring him to mind
More does he appear
In many forms, giving new pains.
When he the Beautiful tries to distance me
I feel all the more attached to him,
What bewitching charm he knows !

You call me evil,
Tell then, to the evil lotus,
The sun from afar looks at her.

'Prema Chintamani'

March on

Arise thou, killer of foes
Heroes of India with lion's prowess.
Shirk not, never look back
Be manly and strike the revenge.
Why the world in mocking disdain,
Would contemptuously look down upon thirty three crores?
Better plunge in fire and get burnt,
Better the body perish, but honour held aloft.
Swarajya is our birth-right,
Achieve it or die with heroic action,
Let Hindusthan be submerged in ocean
The lofty peaks of Himavanta crumble
To pieces and sink in sea.
If men, thou arise not
We will come forward as warriors.
If thou retreat in fear
We will fling all shyness and step out
We the women will enter the arena
And wield the sword of non-cooperation.
To the battlefield of Satyagraha
We will all march in a body.
We are the Shakti uniting India
Having no trace of fear of the enemy.
Let them throw us into prison
And slay our bodies to pieces,
Or hang us to death,
We fear not death through fire and flame.
In violent forms of the Chandi and Chamanda
We will agitate, defeating the enemy-power.

'Ahwan'

Ways of worship

'Hari', 'Hari', one chants Thy name constantly.
Another calls you as Prabhu, O Lord!
And some other without uttering Thy name
Suffer for Thee.

One sees Thee in images of wood and stone
The other sees Thee in men, and love,
Someone regards Thee as Mother.
And another feels that Father Thou art.

Various are the ways in which
Thy form, in love, lights up devotees' heart,
Your beauty manifested at all times,
Morning and night,
In light and in darkness as well.

One lovingly collects flowers, *tulsi*, sandalpaste
The *duba* grass than, offering his oblations,
The other worships Thy feet, smilingly
And another with his tears !

One finds Thee without form,
The other finds Thee in all forms of creation,
Another finds Thy image in his heart,
Someone carries you in Saligram.

Some hear Thy voice in all creation,
Some hear it through another's words,
Some listen it inside their beings,
Wherever heard, the mind is enchanted.

Weeping for Thee night and day
The lustre of one's eyes dimmed,
Meditating on Thee another's mind
Is bathed in the depth of delight.

Relinquishing family and the world
One becomes mendicant in Thy name.
Others living Thy law, remain householders.

Yet another renounces all pleasure
Dedicating his life's mission to Thee,
Wanders along land, forest and mountains
Singing merits of Thy name.

One worships Thee as Krishna
And another prays Thee as Christ
All ways of adoration, all paths to Thee
Are true, nothing insignificant.

Thou art the Lord, I realise
Omnipresent Thou art
And dwelleth in my soul,
Let my mind cling to Thy feet
And my soul to Thy path of Truth.

'Anjali'

Motherland

Thy face of beauty
Mother mine,
Is soothing to my life
Like cooling sandalpaste of love.

Crests of thy rising hills
And forests dense are to me
The *Nandanvana* of paradise.

Full of beauty thy forest flowers,
Delightful the blue water of thy lakes.
Thy river Mahanadi hallowed as Ganga
Thy ocean is Laxmi's abode.

Temples thine are feast for my eyes,
Holy the sands of Puri-*Chakratirtha,*
Fort Barabati, historic battlefield of thy heroes—
Its soil worthy to be worn
As *tilak* on our forehead.

Thou appear to be plunged in grief
Tears flowing from thine eyes
My life yoked to thy feet
Weeping with thee
Shall I pass my life.

'Archana'

Mysterious lover

Never was it known
That in kindness one turns severe,
Out of love, becomes oppressive.

He comes closer and closer
Then to run away farther,
Making the lover weep;
While serving nectar
Puts poison,
Adding to the deadly agony ?

However one may chase Him,
Crossing the woods, mountains
And the ocean,
Performing arduous *tapasya*
For ages,
In this world and other worlds.

He links himself as
Life of life, yet slips;
Nearer, one moment
Farther, the next ;
Consoles with soft soothing words,
Again follows by giving torment.

'Archana'

Vain is your worship

You seek me
And scan the scriptures,
But at your door I call.
Fasting, you perform
Tapasya in the woods
But hungry I wander.

As pangs of hunger
I exist in slums
I exist in tears that trickle
From widow's eyes
In destitute's garb
Under the trees I sleep
And you, heedless
Dwell cosily in mansions !

My body shivers in biting cold
And blood dries up,
You call yourself a devotee
And feel no shame ?
You hear not the cry around
Asking for bread !
And you seek me, where ?
For whom are these flowers fresh,
The scented sandal-paste
Lighting the golden lamps
For which God are your offerings ?
And out in the open
In tattered rags I roam about,
Did you ever cast a look ?
What salvation you seek,
Friend of the universe, am I
My banner declares,
Vain, your rich offerings, your showmanship,
Have you felt another's grief,
And shed a drop of tear for him any day ?

'Archana'

Arise

What message brings the wind
Making flowers nod throbbingly ?
Against the sky
Striking a symphony.
Whispers the tidings in ear :

You heroic race,
Why sit with head down,
What made you inert ?
Why this impotence ?

Come out into the world
A new light breaks in the East,
A new awakening in Utkal,
Listen to life's pulsating music.
As if power riding the Sun
Smilingly descends from sky,
See the play of power
On land and water,
Give up your slumber
Arise !

Hearken,
Sons and daughters of Utkal,
The world has given the call to you,
It echoes and re-echoes
In the sky and the air,
To action, arise !

'Archana'

A Select Bibliography

Works of Kuntala Kumari Sabat

Poetical Works

Anjali	1922
Uchhwas	1924
Archana	1927
Sphulinga	1929
Ahwan	1930
Prema Chitamani	1930
Odianka Kandana	1936
Gadajat Krushaka	1939
Manikanchan	Incomplete *kavya*

Prose Writings

Bhranti	1923
Naa Zundi	1925
Kali Bohu	1926
Parasha Mani	1927
Raghu Arakshita	1928
Chitrapata	Incomplete
Essays	
Letters	

Writings in Hindi and English

Baramala	Edited by Ajaya Kumar Patnaik, 1988
Sapna	Incomplete
Nari	1936-37
Jagaran	1936-37
Satitwa	1936-37
Sudin	1936-37
The Neglected Land.	

Works on Kuntala Kumari Sabat

Kabi O Kabita by Mayadhar Mansingh, Grantha Mandir, Cuttack, 1984.

Sri Aurobindo by K.R.S Iyanger, 1950.

Kuntala Kumari Kabi Pratibha by Sarala Devi, 2nd Edition, Bani Binod Granthalaya, Rajabagicha, Cuttack 1958.

Adhunik Odia Sahityara Bhitti Bhumi by Natabar Samantaray, Friends Publishers, Cuttack, 1964.

Odia Sahityara Itihasa, by Natabar Samantaray 1964.

Odia Sahityara Itihasa by Mayadhar Mansingh, Grantha Mandir, Cuttack 1968.

Kuntala Kumari Granthamala Vol-1, Cuttack Students Store, Balu Bazar, Cuttack 1968.

Kuntala Kumari Granthamala, Vol-2, Cuttack Students Store, Balu Bazar, Cuttack 1968.

Kuntala Kumari Jivana Charita by Chakradhar Mohapatra, Grantha Mandir, Cuttack, 1972.

Side Lights on History and Cullture of Orissa Edited by M. N. Das, 1977.

Sabujaru Sampratika by Nityananda Satapathy, 1979.

Kuntala Katha Pratibha by Ranjita Nayak (1986), 1st Edition, Orissa Book Store, Cuttack.

Oriya Sahityare Nari Pratibha by Savitri Rowt.

Jeeban O Jeebani by Kunjabihari Dash.

Magazine Sahakar Vol-12, 1st issue.

Utkal Sahitya Vol-27,10th Issue.

Sahakar Vol-17, 1st Issue.